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Montana Bar Shooting Leaves Four Dead, Former Soldier Identified as Suspect

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A deadly shooting at a local bar in Anaconda, Montana, left four people dead Friday morning, prompting a major law enforcement search and lockdown in a nearby mountain

community. Authorities have identified the suspect as 45-year-old Michael Paul Brown, a former U.S. Army and Montana National Guard service member.

The incident occurred around 10:30 a.m. at The Owl Bar, according to the Montana Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), which is leading the case. Officials confirmed that three patrons and a bartender were killed at the scene. The suspect, Brown, is believed to have lived next door to the bar and was familiar with the victims. The motive remains under investigation.

Bar owner David Gwerder, who was not present during the shooting, stated he believed Brown had no known disputes with the victims. “He knew everybody that was in that bar. I guarantee you that,” Gwerder said. “He didn’t have any running dispute with any of them. I just think he snapped.”

Following the shooting, authorities launched a manhunt in the nearby Stump Town area, located just west of Anaconda. Law enforcement agencies, including a SWAT team and the Montana Highway Patrol, responded swiftly, sealing off the area and conducting an aerial search using a helicopter. Brown was last seen in the region and is believed to be armed, according to police.

Michael Paul Brown served in the United States Army as an armor crewman from 2001 to 2005, with a deployment to Iraq from early 2004 until March 2005. He later joined the Montana National Guard, where he served until March 2009. Brown left military service with the rank of sergeant, according to Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Ruth Castro.

As news of the shooting spread, businesses across Anaconda quickly took precautions. Nearby child care center, Caterpillars to Butterflies, went into lockdown. Owner Sage Huot said the staff moved children away from windows and kept the facility secure. “We’re constantly doing practice drills, fire drills, and active shooter drills, so we locked down the facility,” she said.

Other local business owners echoed the community’s alarm. Barbie Nelson, owner of the Firefly Café, locked up her shop shortly after 11 a.m. “We are Montana, so guns are not

new to us,” Nelson said. “For our town to be locked down, everybody’s pretty rattled.”

Anaconda, with a population of about 9,000, is a historic mining town approximately 75 miles southeast of Missoula. Nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains, the town has not seen an incident of this scale in recent memory.

As of Friday evening, law enforcement continued to search for Brown. The Montana Highway Patrol urged residents to remain alert and report any sightings. The investigation remains active, with local, state, and federal authorities involved in the effort to locate and apprehend the suspect.